

*BRIDGING THE MARKETING GAP: A REVIEW OF HOW TO THINK  
LIKE A BEHAVIOR ANALYST: UNDERSTANDING THE SCIENCE  
THAT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE BY JON BAILEY AND MARY BURCH*

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The field of applied behavior analysis has suffered from a relative dearth of user-friendly books appropriate to a lay audience. Bailey and Burch's book fills this niche with a work that is both entertaining and informative. The book is reviewed in terms of the strengths and limitations of its content, as well as in the context of the importance of effective marketing of behavior analysis.

DESCRIPTORS: behavior analysis textbooks, marketing behavior analysis

Effective marketing of behavior analysis has been a challenge historically for our field. For nearly 30 years, behavior analysts have commented on our struggle to effectively disseminate our science and technology (e.g., Axelrod, 1996; Bailey, 1991; Deitz, 1994; Foxx, 1996; Morris, 1985; Neuringer, 1991; Turkat & Feuerstein, 1978). The question that inevitably arises is why our marketing and public relations problems continue to haunt us, despite a wealth of empirical evidence that behavior analysis is an effective approach to dealing with a multitude of behavioral issues. Several authors have argued that the philosophy of behaviorism itself has contributed to public misconceptions about our science and subsequent rejection of our technology. For example, Axelrod noted the apparent contradiction of behavioral approaches with the prevailing views in education and psychology. As opposed to relying on mentalistic or temporally remote explanations for

behavior (as is common in education and psychology), behavior analysis looks to the present environment to identify causes of behavior. Thus, our focus on current environmental contingencies as the most salient determinants of behavior fails to glorify the individual as a free and mysterious being. Instead, it identifies humans essentially as a collection of behaviors controlled by the environment (Skinner, 1971). This notion has been controversial for years (see Dennett, 1978), so public resistance to these threats to freedom and dignity should come as no surprise. However, one might argue that the majority of the general public is not aware of the philosophic underpinnings of behavior analysis, so this cannot possibly account for all of our dissemination woes.

Another proposed barrier to acceptance is that our language has produced public misunderstanding of behavior analysis, thus thwarting widespread acceptance. Specifically, some have noted that although technical terminology has helped to develop our science, it also has contributed to decreases in the general public's understanding of our technology (Bailey, 1991; Foxx, 1996; Lindsley, 1991; Rolider, Axelrod, & Van Houten, 1998).

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*Jargon* is defined as language that is used by a group, profession, or culture, especially when the words and phrases are not understood or used by other people (www.encyclopedia.com). A further complication of the jargon of behavior analysis is that many of the terms have different (and sometimes opposite) meanings to lay people. Thus, words such as *control*, *manipulation*, *organism*, *negative reinforcement*, *consequences*, *contingencies*, *extinction*, and *punishment* might have confusing or even offensive connotations. Misunderstandings are inevitable if researchers and practitioners use technical language to describe behavior-analytic principles without assessing audience comprehension. One danger of such misunderstandings is that they can spread and subsequently influence potential consumers, making them less receptive to behavior analysis. Perhaps nowhere are these misunderstandings more evident than in the writings of Alfie Kohn (1999), a vocal opponent of behavior analysis who equates reinforcement with bribery and encourages parents and educators to do away with anything other than “intrinsic motivation.” If Kohn teaches us anything, it is if we do not define our terms for public consumption, someone else will.

Another possible factor standing in the way of effective dissemination is that many in our field have not regarded our science as a product that should be marketed and sold (cf. Bailey, 1991; Binder, 1994). Without effective marketing, we run not only the risk of being misunderstood but also of being overlooked. Therefore, perhaps a more pressing problem is not that people misconstrue our science and technology, but that they do not even know it exists. Communicating through journal articles and conference presentations are appropriate methods of talking among ourselves, but these methods are not likely to reach those who could most benefit from our science and technology (Axelrod, 1996). If we want applied behavior analysis to be regarded as a viable assessment and treatment option among a wealth of

competitors (e.g., medication, counseling, speech therapy), a more proactive approach to marketing probably is warranted. The effects of such efforts surely will have economic effects (i.e., more demand for behavior analysts), but perhaps more important, it will help to ensure the continued existence of our field. As noted by Morris (1985), “If a scientific community does not arrange for contingencies that assure its survival, then so much the worse for that community, and for the rest of the culture at large” (p. 108).

Unfortunately, simple and straightforward behavior analysis books intended for nontechnical audiences have been relatively sparse. Pryor’s (1999) *Don’t Shoot the Dog* is a delightful exception, but the title might lead readers mistakenly to believe that the book pertains solely to animal training. Another exception is Maurice’s (1993) *Let Me Hear Your Voice*, which presents her family’s struggle with her daughter’s (and later her son’s) diagnosis of autism and clearly exposes the power of behavior-analytic treatments. In fact, some might argue that this book was the catapult that put behavior analysis back in the public eye.

It would be difficult to deny that references to applied behavior analysis in the popular media have increased over the past several years, especially with regard to autism intervention. This publicity undoubtedly has helped to promote the field; unfortunately, tales of our effectiveness with children with autism tell only part of the story. There is still much left to do. As anyone in our field can attest, the scope of research and practice in behavior analysis extends well beyond autism—a fact that often surprises people who are unfamiliar with behavior analysis. It seems that our challenge, therefore, is not necessarily to market behavior analysis as an evidence-based approach to dealing with specific populations or behavior problems, but to promote the field of behavior analysis as a solution to nearly all problems

involving human behavior in a way that is engaging and accessible to lay audiences. Bailey and Burch (2006) have taken a step in this direction with the publication of their book, *How to Think Like a Behavior Analyst*.

Although the authors suggest that the book could be used as a supplement to a behavior analysis or introductory psychology textbook, perhaps one of its greatest strengths is that it was not written exclusively for students. This very deliberate choice is a departure from most offerings in the behavior-analytic book market. A quick search of amazon.com using the keywords *behavior analysis* will reveal a myriad of excellent textbooks, but nothing that is likely to be appropriate for a parent, teacher, or direct-care provider as a good overview of the field. Quite appropriately, textbooks are written to provide a strong foundation for learning the science and technology of behavior analysis, but they generally do not make for enjoyable afternoon reading. If we are serious about marketing the field of behavior analysis, we need to make learning about behavior analysis reinforcing. In this capacity, Bailey and Burch have succeeded admirably.

Fashioned after the popular *How to Think Like a Psychologist* (McBurney, 2002), Bailey and Burch have structured their book in a question-and-answer format, addressing nine topic areas. Included within the topic areas are 50 questions about behavior analysis, ranging from "What is behavior analysis? Is it psychotherapy?" to "Some people refer to reinforcement as a form of bribery. Do you agree with that?" Each question is answered in a succinct and largely jargon-free manner, with the longest answer being only five pages. Further, the format does not require that the book be read cover to cover for one to acquire helpful information regarding a particular aspect of behavior analysis. Each question-answer pairing is self-contained and can stand alone as a vehicle for conveying the pertinent information. In addition to presenting topics in a conversational

style, the authors have increased the likelihood of reader interest by including several references to the popular media, both recent (e.g., Dr. Phil) and historical (e.g., *Baby in a Box*). Answers to questions often are explained further by examples from the authors' personal experiences or from the behavioral literature. When conveying the latter, the authors are careful to present the information in a nontechnical manner that seems to "tell a story" about the research study rather than simply presenting the methods and results.

In reviewing the content, particular audiences may find some chapters more useful than others. In the opening chapter, titled "Basic Concepts," the authors not only define the field but also summarize some of the foundational concepts of philosophy, science, and application of behavior analysis. For a student of behavior analysis, these basic constructs probably will have been covered in textbooks or by classroom lecture, which could render the chapter somewhat redundant. However, the chapter is essential for lay people with no prior exposure to the field.

Chapter 2 ("Applications") addresses the scope of behavior-analytic application. The authors explain the prevalence of behavior analysis in developmental disabilities, but also are careful to address a much wider range of applications, including community-based intervention, organizational behavior management (OBM), and self-management. It is unclear why the authors devoted specific questions to some areas of applications (e.g., OBM, autism, gerontology) but addressed others within a single question (i.e., "Can you use behavior analysis in 'real life'?"). Readers interested in behavior-analytic contributions to particular areas of application (most notably, parenting and education) may have difficulty finding the information they need, or worse, may believe that these areas have not been addressed by the field (especially if the book is not read from beginning to end). In the next edition of the

book, the authors might consider including questions and answers related to each major area of application.

Chapters 3 and 4 (“The Science and Technology of Behavior” and “General Issues of Behavior”) tackle some of the more technical aspects of the field. The authors present differentiations between such concepts as research and treatment, functional analysis and functional assessment, and respondent and operant behavior. Consistent with the tone of the book, answers to these questions are succinct and easily accessible to individuals with little or no experience in behavior analysis. A list of key concepts at the end of these and other chapters essentially provides technical search terms (e.g., *stimulus fading*, *extinction*, *social validation*), thereby increasing one’s likelihood of success at independently acquiring additional information. Although the purpose of these chapters may have been simply to give the reader answers to some basic questions about the field, they in fact achieved a much broader goal. In the span of less than 20 pages, the authors illustrate the breadth of behavior-analytic applications, including such settings as group homes, schools, dog obedience classes, communities, as well as one’s own home and work environments.

Chapter 5 (“The Behavioral Take on Other Fields of Psychology”) is perhaps the most controversial and probably will not win behavior analysts many friends in other psychology disciplines. To their credit, the authors concede that some disorders might best be left to other professionals (e.g., schizophrenia), but there is a concern that the authors may have “gone beyond their data” in suggesting that behavior analysts could assist medical doctors in the treatment of some mental disorders, including depression. Although cognitive behavioral research has assessed treatments for this particular disorder, purely behavior-analytic research clearly has not. To bolster support for their claims, the authors would have been well

advised to cite some of the clinical therapies based on behavior-analytic principles, which have been labeled collectively *clinical behavior analysis* (Hayes & Bissett, 2000). Instead, they chose to characterize counseling approaches as purely “talk therapy,” suggesting that most of these strategies involve simply talking about one’s problems without any plan for changing behavior. Although this might be true for some clinical therapies, it is certainly not the case for all of them (e.g., cognitive behavior therapy). The authors’ claims that behavior analysis can “play an important role” (p. 107) in treating such problems as obesity and alcoholism suffer similar deficiencies in empirical support. Although it is not hard to imagine how behavior analysts could analyze these behaviors and design effective treatment programs, the simple fact is that we have yet to do so convincingly.

Chapter 6 is entitled “Basic Skepticism.” The case for skepticism is made by describing occasions in which people have been hoodwinked by so-called “therapeutic interventions” (e.g., facilitated communication) and serves as brief primer on critical thinking. Another important topic in the chapter concerns standards of proof, which is undoubtedly one of the most important concepts for human service providers to understand. However, the authors might have considered incorporating the term *evidence-based practice* (mentioned in Chapter 1), because this term has become popular in education and other areas of service provision. Despite the popularity of the term, however, many people within the organizations that tout its use are lacking in the skills to define it, much less to implement it. Bailey and Burch might have missed a golden opportunity to reach this audience by their use of a term more popular in scientific circles. The third topic addressed in the chapter is free will, and the authors are to be commended for tackling this slippery slope in a book intended for a nontechnical audience. Freedom is a contentious topic and a potential stumbling block to

public acceptance of behavior analysis, so it is understandable that the authors appear to sidestep the issue a bit. Specifically, the bulk of the chapter is devoted to explaining how aversive control limits our freedom, and that access to positive reinforcers makes us freer. Although the authors state that behaviorists are determinists and believe behavior is controlled by its consequences, their stance is soft. Perhaps this is simply a matter of good public relations, but given the complexity of the issue and its potential misrepresentation by oversimplification, the authors might have been better served to leave the topic out altogether.

Chapter 7 ("Myths and the Media") is an absolute gem, as it addresses many of the questions behavior analysts have been asked repeatedly throughout their careers. Isn't reinforcement just bribery in disguise? Won't children become dependent on token reinforcement? Did Skinner raise his kids in a box? The chapter concludes with an analysis of the behavior-analytic characteristics of problem solvers in the popular media (e.g., Dr. Phil, the Supernanny). Although these questions may become dated (and we assume will be replaced with the next flavor-of-the-month approach to solving human behavior problems), their inclusion adds a bit of popular culture that may spark interest in readers less compelled by science than the entertainment page of *USA Today*.

Chapter 8 ("Getting Started in a Career in Behavior Analysis") is undoubtedly the most useful chapter for students, both novice and advanced. A range of topics is covered with regard to behavior-analytic careers, from educational requirements and certification to a description of what a typical day is like for a behavior analyst. The insights provided by these experienced behavior analysts will prove invaluable for any student seeking a career as a practitioner. For those not familiar with behavior analysis, the chapter could prove to be a powerful setting event for considering a career in our field. Put another way, the passion

and enthusiasm the authors display for the science and the profession are contagious.

The final chapter is entitled "Behavior Analyst Code of Ethics." Though short, the chapter addresses some key issues, including an overview of the Behavior Analysis Certification Board's *Guidelines for Responsible Conduct*, objections to punishment, and transparency of behavioral procedures. The final topic deals with appropriately responding to the age-old "Are you analyzing me?" question. The authors' response is perfect, and has as its underlying theme that we should all strive to be good behavior analysis ambassadors.

All in all, Bailey and Burch (2006) have succeeded in writing a book that promotes behavior analysis using an entertaining and user-friendly approach. Such a book is long overdue in our field. Many of us have probably referred clients and nonbehavioral professionals to undergraduate textbooks when asked "Can you recommend something that would give me a good overview of applied behavior analysis?" We probably also have found those textbooks in exactly the same place we left them when we returned to pick them up. Thanks to the authors, we now have a book that is likely to be *read* by laypersons, and more important, *understood*.

Some may argue that the authors' approach dilutes our theory and science for the sake of effective marketing. We agree that oversimplifying the field to the extent that behavior analysis becomes a "bag of tricks" rather than a scientific discipline is a valid concern. Portions of the book that provide examples of how one could begin changing another person's behavior with simple techniques like antecedent manipulation and reinforcement may suggest a simplicity in behavioral intervention strategies that is not necessarily true. However, this book was not written as a stand-alone textbook or as a manual for "doing" behavior analysis. In fact, the authors state clearly in the preface that their book "is not a theoretical or academic work" (p. xv) and are careful to point out the



importance of appropriate training throughout the book.

Behavior analysts often complain that we are misunderstood and that our science and technology are misrepresented repeatedly. We have lamented our lack of good public relations in areas other than autism. We have bemoaned the lack of acceptance of our procedures and their subsequent failure to make lasting systemic changes. Perhaps we have mistakenly believed that doing good work and producing meaningful research would be enough. Clearly, they have not been. We need to share our science with people outside our discipline, and we need to speak without overwhelming them with jargon. We need to actively dispel myths without being defensive. We need to be good ambassadors of behavior analysis in all that we do. If our goal is indeed to change the world with behavior analysis, Jon Bailey and Mary Burch have provided an invaluable tool to keep us moving in the right direction.

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